

## The U.S. Pacific Command Humanitarian Demining Program

Under the direction of the U.S. Pacific Command, SOCPAC guides the deployment of Special Operations Forces to mine-affected countries throughout Asia and the Pacific to teach clearance and develop indigenous capabilities.

By Joe Lokey, MAIC

The focal point for U.S. military assistance in humanitarian demining efforts in Asia and the Pacific Rim is a small, two-person office in an obscure wing of an old building on Camp H.M. Smith in Hawaii. It is from this office that two members of the Special Operations Command Pacific (SOCPAC) plan and coordinate humanitarian demining training and equipment donations to Laos, Thailand, Cambodia and Vietnam.

SOCPAC is a sub-unified command under the direction of the U.S. Pacific Command (USPACOM) and is responsible for activities covering two-thirds of the Earth's surface and 15 time zones. The training teams come from Special

Forces units both within the Pacific theater and from units based on the West Coast of the United States. EOD personnel from other military units in the Pacific also augment the teams. Once they enter a country for a training mission, they are under the operational control of SOCPAC, which coordinates their activities with the host nation's U.S. embassy and their home units. They are the ideal capability to use in this important initiative because of the unique skills they develop under Special Operations Forces (SOF) training.

### The Role of Special Forces

Although the humanitarian demining mission is a collateral training mission for the Special Forces teams, it directly and substantially

benefits their combat skills and requirements in areas of Foreign Internal Defense (FID) and Unconventional Warfare (UW). These unique capabilities and mission tasks led Special Forces to be chosen to lead the U.S. effort to provide this kind of training and assistance to other nations. Not only do benefits accrue to those being trained, but U.S. soldiers also receive a substantial training benefit that increases their effectiveness.

In this peacetime mission, as in its wartime task, the role of Special Forces focuses on using mission related skills (FID/UW) to establish and train a host nation organization. This occurs at both the headquarters and subordinate level, in a range of basic to advanced skills such as communications, field and trauma medicine, small unit leadership, and logistics support skills. Support training is also provided in demining mission planning, as well as demining and mine awareness teaching techniques. This is all done with full cognizance of the U.S. law that prohibits U.S. forces from entering an active mine field.

In the execution of these missions, the benefits to the U.S. military of deploying Special Forces teams are clearly obvious. These deployments benefit the troops in that they provide: training opportunities to practice mission skills; experience and familiarity with the cultures in these countries; an opportunity to improve already substantial language skills; and



A civil affairs soldier (right) works with a Cambodian officer. c/o MAIC

the ability to enhance the coordination and integration of the host nation and NGOs' involvement in their activities. These unique SOF skills and the troops' considerable coalition building assets make the use of conventional forces in this role less effective.

### The U.S. Goal

The foundation for the U.S. humanitarian demining training effort in the Pacific, and all areas around the globe, is the focus on eventual self-sufficiency and the use of the "train-the-trainer" concept. This ensures that the host nation is fully capable of creating and sustaining their own demining teams and the support infrastructure, sooner rather than later. It is through this philosophy in the Pacific and elsewhere that the United States encourages host nation ownership and understanding of their own experiences and gained knowledge. This is truly a way to ensure that, once fully engaged, a solid foundation is provided for developing local solutions to local problems.

By integrating NGO efforts into

this concept and encouraging the pursuit of donor support funding, a long-term solution to a country's landmine and UXO problem can be easily developed and initiated.

### SOCPAC

The SOCPAC role in humanitarian demining, like other U.S. military involvement, operates to enhance the regional U.S. military posture in the Pacific, contribute to peace and stability in conflict prone regions, have a positive impact on critical humanitarian situations around the Pacific Rim, and foster self-sufficiency and interoperability.

#### The goals of SOCPAC:

- Relieve suffering from the adverse effects of landmines while promoting U.S. interests.
- Alleviate the threat of landmines to the innocent.
- Establish sustainable indigenous demining programs.
- Encourage international cooperation and participation.
- Support the Pacific Commander-

in-Chief's (CINC) regional strategy for national and regional security.

- Improve the readiness and quality of training for the U.S. military involvement.

The U.S. military is specifically funded for this mission through the Overseas Humanitarian Disaster and Civic Aid (OHDACA) appropriation provided yearly by Congress. It provides the transportation, sustainment and equipment needs of the units conducting the training, and a limited initial equipment provision that is donated to the units being trained at the conclusion of training. These missions are coordinated with the U.S. Department of State, which provides more equipment and long-term capabilities to aid nations through the Nonproliferation, Antiterrorism, Demining, and Related Activities (NADR) appropriation.

It is the teamwork and coordination among the agencies working to support a nation, in close cooperation with the U.S. embassy in that nation, that makes the U.S. humanitarian

U.S. soldiers oversee the skills development of deminers. c/o MAIC



demining program so effective. Throughout the Pacific, SOCPAC is recognized as the executive agent for humanitarian demining assistance and will coordinate all U.S. assistance to the following countries that have entered into a formal agreement with the U.S. government:

### Current Programs

#### CAMBODIA

The U.S. assistance and training program began in June 1994 with an assessment visit that set the foundation for mine clearance training and mine awareness training. This was followed by the deployment of a 27-man team in September of that year. There were three separate deployments of similar size and duration every year for the next few years until the summer of 1997 when operations were suspended because of the political situation in Cambodia. An assessment team from the U.S. Department of Defense visited Cambodia in February 2001 to review the situation and determine if U.S. assistance could be re-engaged.

As a result, the United States is planning to provide additional training and support to CMAC in the areas of medical training, munitions storage and handling, and vehicle

maintenance through 2003. This follow-on training has begun with the arrival of a medical training team.

Approximately 50 to 90 people continue to be killed or injured by landmines each month in Cambodia. Current "official estimates" place the number of mines at approximately 4 million-6 million spread throughout some 3,600 mined areas identified to date. These areas are estimated to cover about 2,900 sq. km. The Cambodian Mine Action Center (CMAC), an all civilian institution, believes that the full extent of the mine problem in Cambodia is not accurately known. Mine contamination is spread throughout the country with heavier concentrations in the northwestern provinces. UXO contamination appears to be moderate to high and comprises mostly unsophisticated munitions spread throughout the country with possibly higher concentrations in the central, southern and eastern provinces.

In spite of the heavy focus on Cambodia by the international community, it is likely that mine action operations will need to continue at the current level by CMAC for at least the next 5-10 years. Beyond that, it is likely that a reduced capability will be needed to deal with smaller or lower priority clearance

tasks and numerous individual mine/UXO reports—perhaps as long 50 years.

The military engineers of the Royal Cambodian Armed Forces (RCAF) have been involved in "demining" (and bomb disposal) since approximately 1994. Their contribution to the reduction in the mine/UXO threat has been quite substantial: according to RCAF data, their troops have cleared approximately 26 million sq. m (26 sq. km) and destroyed some 88,000 mines, 46,000 booby traps and 19,000 UXO. Given the magnitude of the mine/UXO problem in Cambodia and RCAF's contributions to date, there is a strong argument to continue their involvement in mine and UXO clearance.

Though the use of national military forces for demining purposes is not unusual, their involvement in humanitarian and/or externally funded mine action activities is presently contentious or an unpopular option for some donors. As a consequence of these sensitivities, the United Nations developed the "United Nations Mine Action And The Use Of The Militaries" policy. This policy, which provides clear guidelines on this issue, was approved by the Inter-Agency Coordination Group on Mine Action on 25 January 1999. For other reasons, the U.S. assistance through both NADR funding and SOCPAC will not be through the RCAF, nor will training activities engage RCAF members. CMAC will remain the sole governmental recipient of U.S. assistance in the foreseeable future.

#### LAOS

The UXO and mine contamination in Laos led to a request for U.S. assistance in early 1995. An assessment team conducted a review of the Lao situation and the National Security



■ Safety procedures and storage requirements are taught in the U.S. training program. c/o MAIC

Council's Interagency Working Group (IWG) approved U.S. assistance for a comprehensive Ordnance Removal and Community Awareness training program in October 1995. The partners in this endeavor with the U.S. teams were the Ministry of Social Welfare and U.N. Development Program (UNDP).

Training of Lao humanitarian deminers began in 1996 with a clearance and awareness mission coordinated by SOCPAC and the United States. This helped to build and establish the original training center at Nam Souang. The Lao teams assumed responsibility for their own training in October 1999 after certification and selection of trainers. Over 104,000 items of ordnance have been cleared since the creation of UXO Lao and over 700 villages visited with comprehensive mine risk education messages.

Though U.S. military technical assistance ended in 1999, UXO Lao continues to train staff at the National Training Center at Ban Ylai. Over 1,000 Lao nationals have graduated with a variety of mine action skills. UXO Lao is emerging from its consolidation phase and is moving

into the sustainment phase of its growth as it seeks to reduce international support and become a fully indigenous and sustainable operation.

In April of 2000, SOCPAC conducted a technical assistance visit to the national Training Center and UXO Lao National headquarters. Possible U.S. assistance in the future will focus on training aids, explosives, and some small unit leadership training.

Though the mine/UXO problem in Laos is still large in comparison to other countries in the region, the political and security situation in the country is stable enough for existing programs to make a significant difference in the coming years. A small increase in Hmong rebel activity in the north does not appear to have a landmine aspect to it and the teams already trained are sufficient to engage any further threat.

#### THAILAND

Though Thailand itself has not been engaged in a major military conflict for quite some time, the threat of smaller cross-border insurgencies and outside conflicts have resulted in

a significant landmine problem for Thailand along its borders with four other neighbors. In 1998, a governmental survey indicated that approximately 796 sq. km of land can not be utilized in these border areas, within which nearly 400,000 people reside. Of these mined areas, 532 sq. km are on the Thai-Cambodian border, 124 sq. km are on the Thai-Lao border, 53 sq. km are on the Thai-Myanmar border, and 87 sq. km are on the Thai-Malaysian border.

The Lao border problem was primarily the result of the Thai Army conflict with the Thai Communist Party that started in 1964 with both using landmines as a principle weapon in a jungle war. The hostilities concluded in 1989. The problem along the Malaysian border was the result of British/Malaysian military fighting with the Communist Party of Malaysia (CPM) from the early 1950s through 1989. The military junta's repression of minority groups in Myanmar (Burma) have also led to increased hostilities and defensive actions along that border. The greatest single use of APL and threat to civilians exists along the Thai-Cambodian border. This legacy

■ U.S. soldiers perform a medical skills training drill for a CMAC advisor in February 2001. c/o SOCPAC



remains from the Khmer Rouge and other internal insurgencies.

From 1994-99, a total of 2,837 landmines were cleared and destroyed by the Burapha Field Force in Sa Keao province. Enhancing existing mine detection dog (MDD) capacity at Pak Chong by acquiring, training and deploying 12 MDDs with handlers. Four MDDs with handlers are operational with Unit #1 and 10 additional dogs are undergoing training at Pak Chong Military Dog Center. The Asian Disaster Preparedness Center (ADPC), an international training center located on the campus of the Asian Institute of Technology in Bangkok, is working in partnership with TMAC to increase mine awareness in Thailand. ADPC hosted a National Seminar on Mine Action in December 1999 to announce the launch of ADPC's Landmine Awareness Program (chaired by HRH Princess Galiyani) to attendees, such as prominent members of the Royal Thai Government. As part of the Landmine Awareness Program, ADPC coordinates monthly mine awareness seminars in Sa Keao province.

U.S. assistance began in 1999 with help in establishing a mine action center in Ratchaburi and a community mine awareness program centered in Lop Buri. Several rotations of training assistance began in August 1999, while the seventh rotation of these teams arrived in January 2001. To date, there have been 300 deminers trained and a cadre of the selected students assuming instructor duties to support the live mine clearance operations which began in July 2000. It is anticipated that sustainment rotations will begin in 2002 with upgrade training and component course training in specific skills.

### VIETNAM

Since the Vietnam War ended in 1975, it is estimated by the Vietnamese government and foreign experts that more than 4,000 Vietnamese have been injured and at least 500 killed in accidents involving landmines and UXO. U.S. and U.N. estimates put the number of mines in Vietnam—a battlefield from the 1940s until the 1970s—at 3.5 million.

The mine/UXO threat is varied and many of the munitions are dated and rusted—making many more sensitive and more dangerous. Vietnam itself produced as many as 18 types of AP mines in the past, mostly as copies of U.S. or Eastern Bloc mines. The only type known to have been produced in the 1990s is the “apple mine”—a recycled BLU-24 bomb. A majority of the heavy landmine and UXO threat is in and around Quang Tri province in central Vietnam along the former Demilitarized Zone (DMZ) between north and south. Other heavily mined areas were along the Sino-Vietnam border. While China claims to have cleared all of its mines from this area, Vietnam says that it cleared more than 100,000 mines from the border between 1992-97.

In July of 2000, an assessment team briefed the U.S. Interagency Working Group on the Vietnamese request for U.S. assistance. As a result, the IWG approved the inclusion of Vietnam in the U.S. program. The initial support package is anticipated to support ongoing demining efforts by providing equipment worth about \$1.7 million to help mine clearance and mine action program management efforts. The Vietnamese have a particular need for assistance with demining and ordnance clearance in shallow littoral areas, as well. The U.S. assistance program is still under formulation and will commence in the summer of 2001.

### Other Regional Concerns

There are other landmine plagued countries in Asia and the Pacific Rim. At the top of most any list would be Myanmar, Sri Lanka, the Philippines, Korea, China, India, Pakistan and Taiwan. Of course, there are very specific guidelines to be met and procedures to be followed by a country desiring to receive U.S. humanitarian demining. In general, U.S. assistance is predicated on (1) the host nation submitting a formal request for assistance through its U.S. Embassy, (2) hostilities in the country having ceased and a workable peace agreement being in place, and (3) the landmine hazards being clearly present.

Not all countries that have requested U.S. assistance have been approved. Also, the demand for the highly skilled Special Forces teams in other areas around the globe is causing a shortage of qualified trainers that limits the availability of these teams. In many cases, a periodic assessment and support team visit, skills upgrade, quality assurance review and analysis, or other limited assistance may be all that can be realistic for any given request. The decision to support any country with assistance rests with the Interagency Working Group (IWG) co-chaired by the U.S. Departments of State and Defense.

Other countries in the Pacific also have significant mine problems but are either ineligible for U.S. assistance or have not asked for assistance. In Myanmar, 10 out of the 14 states and divisions are mined and had some 1,500 landmine victims reported in 1999 alone. In the Karen state, it is believed that one person is either injured or killed by a landmine every day. Information from within the country is unreliable and what is known comes from aid organizations working along the Myanmar-Thailand border. Myanmar also still manu-

factures landmines that are used regularly by the State Peace and Development Council (SPDC) to fight the various armed resistance groups battling with the military regime, including ethnic minority groups from the Shan, Karen and Karenni states in the east of Myanmar, and Chin and Arakan states in the west. The two most common are patterned after the Chinese Type 58 blast mine and Type 59 stake mine.

Another key Pacific country with a significant landmine problem is Sri Lanka. By the end of 1999, a small U.N. demining team in Jaffna supported by the Australian and Dutch governments had cleared about 68,500 sq. m of mined land, destroyed 577 APLs and unearthed 42 unexploded devices. Clashes with the Liberation Tigers of Tamil Eelam (LTTE) are increasing and overtaking land formerly held and controlled by government forces. Meanwhile, refugees' occupation of previously mined areas is a major humanitarian concern in a conflict that has killed 65,000 people since 1983. The LTTE has become adept at using landmines in addition to weaponry that is often far more advanced and plentiful than those used by government forces, as evidenced by their purchase of SA14 missiles from Bulgaria and 60 tons of high explosives from the Ukraine. The consecutive losses of 11 government camps in the Wanni in November 1999 and Elephant Pass in

April 2000 demonstrated that this conflict is likely to persist for some time.

A major new development in June 2000 occurred with the report of landmines in the Philippines. Guerilla groups from the Moro Islamic Liberation Front (MILF) and the New People's Army have been employing landmines against government and police forces, as have the bandit groups from the smaller Abu Sayyaf who kidnapped tourists in 2000. Of major concern is that many of the radical groups in the Philippines and Indonesia may be developing operational ties since a raid on a major MILF base last July resulted in Indonesian passports being discovered. The national army appears to be fully capable of meeting this threat and it is not anticipated that the U.S. government will become actively engaged in assisting the Philippines in the near future. As bilateral military exercises are conducted annually with the Philippines, this threat is recognized and dealt with to ensure proper awareness and responses are considered for the safety of all forces.

Ethnic unrest and uncertainty must continually be watched as small and poorly armed, but devoted insurgency groups seek to instill fear and respect through the use of cheap and easily manufactured weapons such as APLs and other similar improvised explosive devices (IEDs).

## U.S. Pacific Command

Police and Islamic activists with homemade bombs clashed in Brahmanbaria, Bangladesh, on February 6, killing six. A landmine attack in Kashmir, India, by the Lashkar-e-Tayyiba militants killed two soldiers on February 7. After a relatively mine-free conflict in East Timor, Indonesia, ended, the government there now faces a growing threat from others looking to follow as the growing build up in West Papua is being watched closely.

Finally, the Maoist insurgency has been growing in Nepal. In September 2000, 14 policemen were killed when the headquarters in the Dolpa district were sieged. There were no reports of APLs or IEDs being used in this instance, but the concern remains even today.

As long as landmines and UXO hamper post conflict reconstruction, pose a significant threat to civilians and cause internal shifts in refugees in Asia and the Pacific, there will be a need for training assistance and support that is ideally suited to the skills, experiences and expertise of the U.S. military units in the Pacific. When it is called upon to provide this assistance, SOCPAC will coordinate and manage its employment and program content to ensure that the highest quality training support and assistance is given. The end result will be a sustainable program and an able host nation capability. ■